

THOMAS D'ARCY MCGEE.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ST. PATRICK'S SOCIETY OF SHERBROOKE, P.Q.,

BY

ROBERT D. MCGIBBON

OF MONTREAL, BARRISTER,

MARCH 17th, 1884.

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MONTREAL

DAWSON BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

1884.

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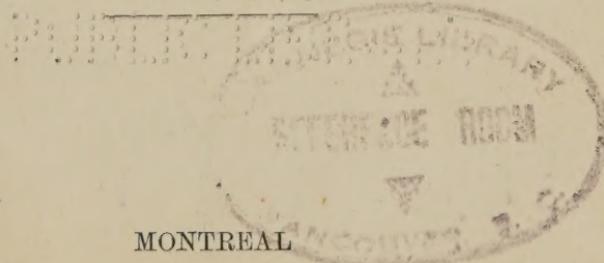
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The following address is published to response to the request contained in the subjoined

RESOLUTIONS:

At a special meeting of the St. Patrick's Society of Sherbrooke held at their Hall on Saturday, the 22nd March, 1884, it was moved and unanimously

Resolved, That the thanks of this Society are due and are hereby tendered to R. D. McGibbon, Esq., for the eloquent and instructive address on the life and character of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, delivered at the Annual Concert of this Society on the 17th inst., and that by his kind acceptance of the invitation to address them at their annual celebration, he has by the nature of his conference given proof of his sympathy and friendship for Irishmen.

That the accuracy with which he described the events in the career of one of our most distinguished fellow countrymen on this Continent, the late Hon. Thos. D'Arcy McGee, shows that he bestowed great care in the preparation of his work, the literary part of which reflects credit upon its author.

That his appreciation of the deceased patriot-statesman's career gives evidence of a most commendable broadness of view suitable to the spirit of liberality which happily exists in this Canada of Ours.

That it being desirable that the career of the late Hon. T. D. McGee should be made more widely known and that the publication of his biography as given by R. D. McGibbon, Esq., at our entertainment on the 17th inst., in pamphlet form would be the most efficacious manner to attain that end, it is

Resolved, That the Secretary of this Society be, and is hereby, instructed to communicate this desire to Mr. McGibbon, and with his consent to make the necessary arrangements for the printing of the pamphlet.

W.M. MURRAY, President.

JOHN H. WALSH,
Sec. St. Patrick's Society.

SHERBROOKE, March 24th, 1884.

100460

THOMAS D'ARCY McGEE.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It may seem strange that on an occasion like the present, when the Irish men and women of Sherbrooke, on this, the anniversary of their patron Saint—like thousands of their fellow-countrymen in all parts of the world—have assembled to have their hearts once more made glad by listening to the music which the bards of Erin have made immortal, and by hearing again the dear old songs crooned above their cradles anon by the voices of loving mothers; to have their patriotism re-kindled by the recital of deeds of Irish chivalry which appeal to them and to all mankind; to have the fervour of their piety awakened and renewed by those thoughts of self-sacrificing devotion and godliness which must, perchance, be re-called to-night,—it may seem strange, I say, that on such a night as this, in this distant land, far, far away from the sunny isle which all these precious memories invite you in imagination to re-visit, you should care, much less wish, to hear the voice of one in whose veins no drop of your own Irish blood courses, who kneels not at your altar, though he glories with you in all your cherished past.

It is this thought, sir, the reflection that I, a Canadian of Scotch and Protestant descent, have been by your courteous kindness invited to address you, the Irishmen of this beautiful city, which has moved me to select the subject upon which I would venture to speak, and to propose to offer a few remarks upon the life and character of probably the greatest of Irish Canadians, the late Thomas D'Arcy McGee.

In a recent speech, one of the most distinguished and polished members of the Canadian bench claimed for himself a truer and a more praiseworthy Canadianness than that of his sons, for, although it was the land of their nativity, it was the country of his adoption; and if this be true, who, I would ask, was a better citizen of Canada, than he who, coming to these shores from the troubled, tempest-tossed Isle of Erin—hot from the conflicts which distracted her, found here a resting and abiding place, where he could forgive, if not forget, the animosities and strifes which had engaged him, and bend all his energies and abilities to the betterment of the new home which he loved and served so well.

Not often have the chilly winters been succeeded by the resurrecting spring, the genial fructifying summer, and the gorgeous autumn, with all its stores of plenty,—the months indeed have been few since the deadly bullet of the assassin struck down in all the pride and vigour of his life the man whose name we all revere. But sufficient time has passed, the zephyrs of the years have dispelled the smoke which may have obscured the gladiators in the fight, enough to warrant us in trusting to the accuracy of our judgment in forming an estimate of his character. Time, after all, is the true test of truth, and a fame which gathers beauty and strength as the years roll by, is sure to have been founded upon a more solid basis of merit, than a more prominent and obtrusive renown which does not outlast the ephemeral laudations of contemporary panegyrics.

I would entreat you then to bear with me while I pass in brief review the more striking events in the career of this distinguished Canadian, I do not qualify the term, from whose life I make bold to affirm we can all derive profit and instruction.

I.

Thomas D'Arcy McGee was born on the 13th of April, 1825, at Carlingford, County Louth. His father, Mr. James McGee, was then in the Coastguard Service, and his mother was a Miss Dorcas Catherine Morgan, the daughter of a Dublin bookseller whose connection with the troubles of '98 wrought his financial ruin.

The scenery of the locality amidst which the boy passed the fleeting hours of youth is described as being of the loveliest and most romantic character, and who can doubt that his receptive nature drank in from the rocks and hills, and vales and plains, many of those impressions which afterward bubbled forth in true poetic utterance? Devoted to the memory of both his parents, it is of his mother he loved more to speak. A woman, she was, of high education; endowed, as he himself often observed, with a fertile imagination and a cultivated mind. A lover of poetry, and especially fond of the ballads of old Scotland, her greeting to her little son—her favourite child—was always, we are told, couched in the homely words of the Scottish balladist, McNeill:

“O what have ye been in’ the day,
My boy Tammië?”

His mother was also devoted to music, and was wont to sing to the curly-headed urchin the songs of the ancient race to which she belonged, thus implanting in his youthful breast that passionate devotion to his nationality which never, to the last, ceased to be one of the ruling passions of his life. Imbibing from her, too, that religious fervour which unostentatiously but undoubtedly distinguished him, one cannot wonder that a son was deeply, devoutly attached to the memory of a mother to whom he owed so much of the equipment for the battle of life.

But early, perhaps too soon, a shadow came upon the happy home, and the loving music was forever hushed, though the songs and the precepts endured. McGee never ceased to speak of his mother in terms of the purest filial affection. In 1841, at eighteen years of age, the lad, inscribing a poem to his mother, sings :

“The sunbeam falls bright on the emerald tomb,
And the flow'rets spring gay from the cold bed of death,
Which encloses within it, oh ! earth's saddest doom,
Perfections too pure for the tenants of earth.”

Of McGee's schoolboy days we have little or no record beyond the fact that he attended the day school at Wexford, whither his family removed. We can entertain no doubt, however, that the boy must have been a diligent scholar, not only of general literature, but especially of the legendary and folk lore of Ireland.

From whatever cause, at the age of seventeen, McGee decided to cross the ocean and make his home in America, and in the year 1842 he took ship for Boston. With what bitter feelings of regret he left the beloved home of his childhood, his juvenile poems, instinct with the anguish of boyish grief, attest. But no vain regrets were permitted to thwart his purpose, and he arrived safely on the western shores ; and, after a short visit to an aunt in Rhode Island, reached Boston in June, 1842. The immediately succeeding 4th of July was too much for the imaginative boy to resist, and he fell a victim to the oration fever, delivering himself, almost within a month of his arrival, of an oration which did him this much good, that a day or two after he was offered, and accepted, a situation on the *Boston Pilot*, becoming two years later the editor-in-chief. The times, fraught with the “Native American” excitement, and the intensity of the Repeal agitation, which was at its height both in America and in Ireland, furnished just such an opportunity as McGee's genius required for its display, and, with all the energy begotten of earnest conviction and active sympathetic patriotism, he threw himself heart and soul into his congenial work. In the columns of his own journal, on the platform at Repeal meetings, by the lectures which he delivered throughout New England, he exerted an influence which was widely felt, and acquired a name for himself, not only in this country, but in the old land itself, where kindred spirits watched with admiration and surprise the workings of their exiled fellow countryman. Proud, indeed, must the young Wexford lad have been when, across the ocean, whose billows he himself had crossed heavy laden and heart sore but three years previously, there came a message from the proprietor of the Dublin *Freeman's Journal*, then one of Ireland's leading papers, inviting the youthful scribe to assume its editorial chair. Can aught be more pleasing to an exile than the assurance that his labours abroad find favour in the eyes of those at home ? Can any praise be more appreciated than that which is wafted to the wanderer from the honoured ones

he has left behind? The gladness with which he accepted the flattering proposal must have been heightened by the knowledge that his selection was largely due to the personal approbation of the great O'Connell. And so in 1845 we find McGee again in the Green Isle, prepared to battle with his voice and his pen for the cause which was so dear to him; ready to devote his talents and his life to the service of his beloved Ireland.

It is unnecessary for me to describe to you the condition of affairs in Ireland at this period, for every Irishman is familiar with the facts. All was excitement and turmoil. O'Connell, till then the acknowledged and unquestioned leader of the Repeal agitation, was beginning to find that the younger spirits of the party no longer accepted with implicit obedience the edicts which he promulgated, but chafed like restive steeds under the restraints which he sought to impose upon their methods.

McGee, impatient at what he considered the too Conservative policy of the *Freeman's Journal*, joined Charles Gavan Duffy, Mitchell, Davis and Reilly, and with them made the *Nation* the mouthpiece of the party, which finally broke loose from the Repealers and decided upon more precipitate measures. The Young Ireland party, which, like hot and impetuous recruits, dashing ahead of the main line of an army are eager —alas! too eager—for the sudden encounter, was composed, as you know, of a brilliant galaxy of young Irishmen. Some of these illustrious youths in after life rose to positions of eminence; others never discovered the portals of the Temple of Fame. In the words of one of them:

“Some on the shores of distant lands
Their weary hearts have laid,
And by the stranger's heedless hands
Their lonely graves were made.
The dust of some is Irish earth,
Among their own they rest;
And the same land that gave them birth
Has caught them to her breast.”

And though historians, looking on the events of those days with the clearer light which is now shed upon them, are disposed to condemn their imprudence and rashness, none can deny the unselfishness of their motives, or the power and talent which they displayed in the conduct of their agitation. The *Nation*, as I have said, was the organ of the party, and its poetry and prose, to both of which McGee largely contributed, fired the minds of the people in a manner truly wonderful.

But the end was to come, and youth was to regret and mourn that it had not listened to the voice of age and the sage advice of the experienced. Need I tell you of the dangers they ran; of their mad exploit and its disastrous finale; how McGee was arrested and released; and then, when in Scotland on a vain errand to arouse the Scottish to assist the scheme, learned of the failure of the rising, and was forced to flee for

his liberty and life? The chapter is a sad one, and McGee lived to regret his part in it.

Time will not permit me to go further into details. Enough to say that again in 1848 McGee turned his face to the western shores, the grief of his departure this time being heightened by the sad separation which he was forced to undergo from the young wife of his bosom. He arrived in Philadelphia on the 10th of October, 1848, and on the 28th of the same month he published the first number of a publication called the *New York Nation*, which was warmly received by his fellow countrymen, partly because of the fame he had already acquired as editor of the *Dublin Nation* and the earlier *Boston Pilot*, and partly, no doubt, out of sympathy for the sacrifices which he had made for the principles he had professed. The *Nation* had for a time a great success, but a conflict between the editor and a venerable prelate, Bishop Hughes of New York, provoked by McGee's accusation against the Irish hierarchy for their alleged supineness and inactivity during the uprising which so signally failed, caused such a diminution of his influence that in 1850 he deemed it wise to remove to Boston and begin the publication of the *American Celt*. It has been impossible for me to obtain access to the files of this paper or other antecedent journals conducted by McGee, but on the authority of his gifted biographer, Mrs. Sadlier, it may be stated that during the first two years of its existence, McGee's utterances were characterized by the same revolutionary tone which had pervaded all his previous political writings and speeches.

"There came, however, a time," to quote the words of Mrs. Sadlier, "when the great, strong mind began to soar above the clouds of passion and prejudice into the regions of eternal truth. The cant of faction, the fiery denunciations, which, after all, amounted to nothing, he began to see in their true colours."

Thenceforward Mr. McGee seemed largely, and in later times completely, to have ceased from the policy of violent agitation, and to have tried less to achieve by force the accomplishment of a political upheaval in the old land, than to have essayed to better the condition of his people in America—to make them satisfied with their lot and content to enter into peaceful competition with fellow Americans in all the arts of industry and progress.

The *Celt* was once removed for a short time to Buffalo, but ended its career, so far as Mr. McGee was concerned, finally in New York in 1857. Let me say that during all this time, Mr. McGee had never ceased to lecture, not only in the States but in Canada, on literary and historical subjects, and had added laurels to the wreath which his efforts in the same field had previously won for him. More than that—by organizing associations of his countrymen for praiseworthy objects he had largely aided in imbuing them with lofty aims and aspirations, and in making

them realize that here in America those aims and aspirations needed nothing but application to ensure their fulfilment.

II.

I now come to the period when Mr. McGee was invited by that important section of the Canadian population which was of Irish extraction to make Canada his home. They doubtless felt at the time the need of a master mind such as his, and to their call he responded with acquiescence, removing his family to Montreal in 1857.

It could hardly be expected that one whose mind had been so wholly absorbed by the exciting scenes which immediately surrounded him, should have had opportunity, much less leisure, to acquaint himself with the circumstances amidst which he found himself on arrival. In matters political, I conceive that such a thing as intuition is a myth, and the most perceptive intellect can trust only to experience in dealing with questions of history and popular habits. But experience can only come with time, and lessons must be learned and experiments made, though the path be thorny and the footsteps at first faltering and uncertain. One thing, however, smooths the road and lightens the burden—the high purpose and noble resolve. And so it was in McGee's case.

To what could he trust for a livelihood, to all intents a stranger, with a family depending upon him, but to his pen, and shortly a paper, *The New Era*, appears at Montreal. The name was significant. It meant that McGee had returned to live under the flag beneath which he had been born; that he recognised that, whatever the wrongs of his people in Ireland, in Canada they had nothing to complain of; that here they had free institutions, just land laws, the practice of their religion, and that, in view of all this, he was willing—not to think no more of those whose lot was different—but as a Canadian first and above all, to strive for the good of his adopted country, and the welfare of the people among whom he dwelt,—living honestly, loyally, faithfully. Let me quote his own words:

In a speech in Montreal, in 1861, he says—"I know, and you know, that I can never for a moment cease to regard with an affection that amounts almost to idolatry, the land where I spent my best, my first years; where I obtained the partner of my life, and where my first-born saw the light. I cannot but regard that land even with increased love, because she has not been prosperous. Yet I hold we have no right to intrude our Irish patriotism on this soil; for our first duty is to the land where we live and have fixed our homes, and where, while we live, we must find the true sphere of our duties. While always ready, therefore, to say the right word, and do the right act for the land of my forefathers, I am bound above all to the land where I reside."

And in another place—"All we need, mixed up and divided as we naturally are, is, in my humble opinion, the cultivation of a tolerant

spirit on all the delicate controversies of race and religion—the maintenance of an upright public opinion in our politics and commerce—the cordial encouragement of every talent and every charity which reveals itself among us—the expansion of those narrow views and small ambitions which are apt to attend upon provincialism."

The new era of his life opened auspiciously, and in 1858 he was returned as one of the three representatives for Montreal in Parliament. It is often said, with what truth I know not, that the inevitable exclamation of an Irish immigrant on disembarking in America is, that he is "agin the Government;" and it is a fact that for the first four years of his parliamentary life, McGee vigorously and ably opposed the administration.

The Government of that day had a double leadership; two great men were united to guide the ship of state, the one, that patriotic Frenchman, the greatest of his race, whose memory is now enshrined in the hearts and affections of the Canadian people, whose name is synonymous with much that is best in Canadian statesmanship, and whose grave is adjacent to that of his then opponent—I refer to the late Sir George Cartier; the other, the distinguished man who, full of years and honours, still devotedly continues to hold the helm, and who, I am sure, we all trust may long be spared to afford us the help and counsel he is so ready and able to give—the Right Honourable Sir John A. Macdonald.

The Cartier-Macdonald Government McGee then opposed. His opposition, whilst not of the most factious description, was such as made itself felt; though its manifestations did not, at times, it must be confessed, contribute to Mr. McGee's reputation for astuteness and prudence. The irresponsibility which those in opposition enjoy often causes them to sacrifice much for effect; prudence is subordinated to brilliancy, wisdom is at times disregarded, for the sake of an effective retort, a caustic rejoinder or a witty attack. And so it happens that men of excellent parts come to be looked upon by the public as triflers, more eager to snatch the sudden triumph of thoughtless applause than to earn a more solid and enduring reputation for wisdom and sincerity. However, McGee achieved a reputation as an orator of the first force, if he did not acquire a place as a parliamentarian of the highest order—a danger which all men run, who, before entering the legislative halls, have been habituated to the addressing of popular assemblies, where appeals to humour, passion and prejudice are more successful in the nature of things, than they can be in the colder and sterner atmosphere which encompasses a deliberative body, charged with the weighty business of administering affairs.

Yet I would not have you believe that McGee did not do much good legislative work during this opposition period. His speeches on the "Double Majority," on "The Difficulties between Upper and Lower Canada," on "Canadian Defences," and especially on "Emigration and Colonisation," are models, to my mind, of Parliamentary oratory. An

exemplary perspicuity, which was consistent with rich classical and poetical allusion, apt illustration, and philosophic periods, distinguish their style. To mere verbosity, or inane rhapsody which so many now-a-days mistake for fine speaking, he never condescended. And he had the faculty of dealing with facts and figures in an interesting happy manner, which laid the foundation of his reputation as an able debater, and a skilled and practised orator.

The ministry at length fell on the 20th of May, 1862, and in the Sandfield-Macdonald-Sicotte Government which succeeded, Mr. McGee accepted the Presidency of the Council, filling also for a short time, the office of Secretary of State. The man's industry is illustrated by the fact that during this time he published his *History of Ireland*, a work which received much commendation, and which still ranks among the best works of its class. But the Government of which he was a member was of short duration, and in 1863, Sandfield Macdonald finding himself in a minority of five, was forced to reconstruct his cabinet, and Mr. McGee was not invited to become a member of the new or reconstructed Government. Mr. McGee disapproved of the action of his chief, and, it may be actuated to some extent by pique, but impelled probably strongly by an affinity which he had, it seems, felt to exist for some time between him and the then opposition, finally crossed the house, and in 1864 joined the Government of Sir E. P. Taché, as Minister of Agriculture, continuing in that position until the final confederation of Canada, in 1867.

In the portentous discussions which the settlement of the scheme of confederation gave rise to, Mr. McGee played well his part, and his eloquent voice was often heard valiantly promoting the cause of the union. The debates which took place within, as well as without the Legislature during the consideration of those great questions are creditable in the extreme to Canadian oratory, and the views of all parties were presented with exceptional eloquence and force. Perhaps it might have been that the subject was, in itself, one calculated to call forth whatever of force, whatever of ardour, whatever of patriotism, there was in the statesmen of the period. The settlement of the future constitution of a young country of immense potentiality is indeed a theme worthy the most generous oratorical gifts; and the patriots of that day created a body of oratory of which their descendants can be proud.

Amidst the giants of that time—for there were giants then, and I am afraid our public life to-day does not present the same galaxy of intellect and culture that those old anti-confederation days did—McGee took a prominent position, and his speeches are among the most powerful.

III.

In 1865, and again in 1867, Mr. McGee visited the old country in official positions, and on both occasions delivered public addresses. In these speeches he did not fail to exhort the statesmen of Britain to do

justice to his fatherland. In one, the great Wexford speech, pronounced in the town where his boyhood had been spent, and which was listened to—with what pride we can imagine—by his aged father, he is reported to have said to the Government—“Treat Ireland as you have treated Scotland—consider her feelings and respect her prejudices—study her history and concede her rights—try equal justice to all—practice the golden rule. Then will Irishmen in Ireland resemble Irishmen in Canada—where the Celt is not envious of the Saxon, and the Saxon is not supercilious to the Celt.”

But he also took occasion to denounce in scathing terms the truculent attempts of adventurers from the neighbouring Republic, to wreak, by invasions of our own soil, their vengeance upon Great Britain. He could not, as he himself said, “stand still and see our peaceful, unoffending Canada invaded and deluged in blood, in the abused and unauthorized name of Ireland.” And so he joined, to his appeals for justice to Ireland, denunciations, fiery and powerful, of the faction which sought to embroil us in war. Needless for me to tell you that the words which he spoke gave deep offence to the Fenians, and thenceforward no malediction was too horrible for McGee, no fate too terrible.

I should here say, in order to follow out the sequence of my narrative, that McGee did not enter the first Confederation Government, waiving his claims to consideration in favor of a distinguished fellow-countryman from Nova Scotia. The excitement and acerbities of the memorable election contest between him and the late Mr. Devlin, with other causes, laid Mr. M’Gee low, with an illness from which he slowly recovered, and he never seemed completely to regain that gaiety of demeanour which made his presence so delightful and his manners so engaging. Perhaps, too, the violent way in which he was continually attacked, the consciousness that a section of his countrymen wilfully misunderstood him, and intentionally misconstrued his conduct, weighed upon his mind. To a nature such as his was, accusations that he was unfaithful to Ireland, that he was a traitor to her cause, and to hear his name coupled with those of Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold, must have been bitterly galling, though in his soul, he knew, as we to-day know, that the charges were as false as Satanic malignity or diabolic hate could invent. Yet all this preyed upon him, and McGee was not himself. Still he was not wholly silent, and though the spirit of the old days did not colour his diction with the wonted fancy and humour, what he did say was as eloquent as of yore.

On the night of the 6th of April, 1868, he spoke from his place in the House of Commons, words of prophetic import. In defending a colleague from a charge which had been brought against him, he said: “Sir, I hope that in this House mere temporary and local popularity will never be made the test by which to measure the worth or efficiency of a public servant. He who builds upon popularity builds upon shifting sand. He who rests

simply upon popularity, and who will risk the right in hunting after popularity, will soon find the object he pursues slip away from him. It is, in my humble opinion, the leader of a forlorn hope, who is ready to meet and stem the tide of temporary unpopularity, who is prepared, if needs be, to sacrifice himself in defence of the principles he has adopted as those of truth; who shows us that he is ready not only to triumph with his principles, but even to suffer for his principles; who has proved himself, above all others, worthy of peculiar honor."

But a few hours after the pronunciation of these statesmanlike words—words which we cannot doubt came straight from a heart which had bled at the thought of the ingratitude which tortured it, and as he was entering his dwelling, a sound of a pistol shot rings out upon the still April night, the bullet flies from the weapon of the cowardly lurking assassin, the brain of the brilliant, genial, kindly, gifted son of Erin is pierced, and his life blood stains the pavement and the street.

You can remember, as I can never forget, the horror and dismay which the sad news created that D'Arcy McGee had been murdered. And for what? Answer the malevolent tongues which assailed him; answer the human furies which goaded the assassin to his deadly work!

Need I to-night tell you of tributes which were paid to him; how the wailing of the nation was loud, and sincere, and unanimous? The highest and the lowest in the land grieved together for him, and a people's sobs spoke of a people's sorrow for a people's loss. For, Sir, the calamity was not Ireland's. It was Canada's, too, and never in the history of this country was lament so universal, so heartfelt. The public obsequies, the expressions of grief from public and private bodies, the eulogies in Parliament, the obituaries in the press, bore witness to the truth and earnestness of a nation's lamentation. The outraged law was satisfied when the impious felon expiated his crime upon the gallows tree. But McGee's loss was irreparable, and his untimely death created a void which was hard to fill—a void in political and literary life, a void in many a social circle, an aching void in a family of which he was the beloved head, a void in all that appertained to our national life.

His body rests in the beautiful cemetery upon the slopes of Mount Royal, where his grave has been bedewed by many a tear; but no national monument marks the place where the patriot, poet, orator sleeps. Horace tells us of monuments more enduring than brass, and granted that the memorials of an honoured name, a place in the literature, in the affections of a nation better preserve the memory of the mighty dead than the lofty column or the stately marble, I yet conceive it to be a duty which a country owes itself to mark in fitting way the resting place of her heroes. Such tangible, visible evidences of the fact that there is such a thing as public appreciation of noble effort for good, and admiration for unselfish patriotism not only show forth a nation's gratitude and reverence, but serve the useful purpose of telling all men that meritorious public service

is not to be forgotten, that a country is not unmindful of an honourable public life. Let us hope that ere long we may not be able to reproach ourselves for this neglect of our patriot's tomb.

IV.

So far I have spoken largely of McGee as the politician and the orator, and less of him as a poet and man of letters. His poems we have had collected for us in a volume of 600 pages. Of his poetry and its merits abler men than I have spoken. One of the foremost critical journals of the old land, the London *Athenaeum*, denominated him the "one true poet" of the Young Ireland party. The giddy whirl of politics, with its enticing fascinations, wooed him from the muse to a large extent in his later life, and so it is that possibly his fame as a poet will largely depend upon the earlier efforts of his genius. To his poems during the "Young Ireland" agitation I have already adverted. The inspiration of such a cause produced many songs, which, to use the words of Charles Gavan Duffy, "touched him like the voice of spring" and merited the felicitous phrase of "Irish Undefiled."

All his poems breathe forth his love for his native land. He sings:

I'd rather be the bird that sings
 Above the martyr's grave,
 Than fold in fortune's cage my wings
 And feel my soul a slave ;
 I'd rather tune one simple verse,
 True to the Gaelic ear,
 Than Sapphic melodies rehearse
 With Senates listening near.

My native land ! my native land !
 Live in my memory still ;
 Break on my ear, ye surges grand !
 Stand up, mist-covered hill !
 Stand in the mirror of my mind,
 The land I love to see ;
 Would I could fly on the western wind,
 My native land, to thee !

And again, in a poem entitled "Homesick Stanzas":

Twice had I sailed the Atlantic o'er,
 Twice dwelt an exile in the West ;
 Twice did kind Nature's skill restore
 The quiet of my troubled breast —
 As moss upon a rifted tree,
 So time its gentle cloaking did ;
 But though the wound no eye could see,
 Deep in my heart the barb was hid.

I felt a weight where'er I went—
 I felt a void within my brain ;
 My day-hopes and my dreams were blent
 With sable threads of mental pain ;
 My eye delighted not to look
 On forests old or rapids grand ;
 The stranger's joy I scarce could brook—
 My heart was in my native land.

Where'er I turned, some emblem still
 Roused consciousness upon my track ;
 Some hill was like an Irish hill,
 Some wild bird's whistle called me back ;
 A sea-bound ship bore off my peace
 Between its white, cold wings of woe—
 Oh ! if I had but wings like these,
 Where my peace went, I too would go.”

Time will not permit me to speak at length upon this portion of my subject, but pray let me commend to every Irishman the perusal of his poetry. The pathos which gilds his verses on historical and religious subjects will appeal to every Irish heart.

Of McGee as an orator I have already spoken, but let me quote one or two short passages from his speeches. What could be finer than the following indications of what ought to be the duty of Canadians in their national life ? He says : “ All we have to do is, each for himself, and you gentlemen, and all of us, to welcome every talent, to hail every inventor, to cherish every gem of art, to foster every gleam of authorship, to honour every acquirement and every national gift, to lift ourselves to the level of our destinies, to rise above all low limitations and narrow circumscriptions, to cultivate that true catholicity of spirit which embraces all creeds, all classes and all races in order to make of our boundless Province, so rich in known and unknown resources, a great new northern nation.”

I may mention that these words have been well chosen by the author of “ *Bibliotheca Canadensa* ” as a fitting motto to grace the title page of his valuable volume.

In his great speech in moving the Confederation resolutions, a speech which only the other day was referred to in one of our public journals and quoted, and which alone would have founded his fame as an orator, he speaks as follows : “ But it is necessary there should be respect for the law, a high central authority, the virtue of civil obedience, obeying the law for the law's sake ; for even when a man's private conscience may convince him sufficiently that the law in some cases may be wrong, he is not to set up his individual will against the will of the country, expressed through its recognized constitutional organs. We need in these Provinces, and we can bear, a large infusion of authority. I am

not at all afraid this constitution eris on the side of too great conservatism. If it be found too conservative now, the downward tendency in political ideas which characterizes this democratic age is a sufficient guarantee for amendment. Its conservatism is the principle on which this instrument is strong and worthy of the support of every colonist, and through which it will secure the warm approbation of the Imperial authorities. We have here no traditions and venerable institutions ; here there are no aristocratic elements, hallowed by time and bright deeds ; here every one is the first settler of the land, or removed from the first settler one or two generations at the farthest ; here we have none of architectural monuments calling np old associations ; here we have none of those old popular legends and stories which in other countries have exercised a powerful share in the government ; here every man is the son of his own works. We have none of those influences about us, which, elsewhere, have their effect upon government just as much as the invisible atmosphere itself tends to influence life and animal and vegetable existence. This is a new land—a land of young pretensions because it is new ; because classes and systems have not had that time to grow here naturally. We have no aristocracy but of virtue and talent, which is the best aristocracy, and is the old and true meaning of the term."

But were I to speak for hours and read you the most copious extracts I would needs fail to adequately express the universality of his genius, the breadth and generosity of his sentiments, or the wealth and sincerity of his patriotism. I have no hesitation in saying that the time has come when McGee's works should be collected and given to the public, and a complete edition of his writings, including his lectures, poems and speeches, should not longer be withheld by his literary executors.

We are told that best men are moulded out of faults, and McGee had his share, and may be said to have been in some respects his own worst enemy ; but it is pleasant for us to remember that for some time anterior to his death, he had foresworn those excesses which beclouded, to some extent, the purity of his life. The most serious charge that was brought against him, next to the false and infamous accusation that he had betrayed Ireland and her cause, was in connection with his alteration of political allegiance in leaving John Sandfield Macdonald and allying himself with his adversaries. I trust, Sir, the time will never come in Canada when the mere act of changing one's political opinions will, in itself, be considered disgraceful. Any such doctrine places a premium upon bigotry, hypocrisy and obstinacy, and a stumbling block in the path of truth and progress. The motive gives the colour to the act ; and, whilst one cannot too severely condemn the turncoat who is moved by sordid considerations, no censure can be too loud for those who hurl at the head of men who change their front from honest conviction, charges of base purpose and ignoble motives.

Throughout his life McGee was always the personal friend of the best classes in the literary and social circles of his home ; and his kindly dis-

position and unfailing bonhomie made him generally beloved. Ever anxious to promote good works and national concord, his services were always freely given to charitable societies of all denominations. Scotch, English, French, and German, found in him a devoted supporter and friend; his heart was with them at all times, and all mingled the sorrowing tear when at last he came to die.

V.

It is told of the great Pericles, that on his death-bed he overheard the attendant friends recalling and enumerating his virtues and merits, and listening, told them they had forgotten his greatest praise, viz., that no Athenian, through his administration, had been caused to put on mourning. And so, I imagine, could the spirit of the great McGee overhear the recital of his virtues and talents, he would cry aloud, "Ye have named my poetic genius, my gifts of oratory, and my graceful diction; ye have told of my genial friendliness, my whole-souled charitableness, but ye have forgotten that above all I was a good Canadian." Yes, I imagine that was his greatest pride that he identified himself completely with the land of his adoption.

I make bold to say that no more potent factor for good has existed in Canada than McGee's life and daily walk. He had arrived in this country with preconceived prejudices and antipathies which he soon saw had no reason for existence on the free soil of Canada, and with manly courage did not disguise his realization of his errors. He became acquainted with Canada, her history, her people, her resources, her laws, and her literature, and with a foresight that was remarkable, from the first, understood the needs of the land and her possibilities. He saw what this land could become if her people were united and contented; he also saw how the stream of her development could be stemmed, how the march of her progress could be retarded and impeded if her people were to prolong and perpetuate the strifes and contentions of other ages and of other climes; and waste their energies in fruitless internecine disputes; and with all the energy of his patriotic soul he toiled to accomplish the one and avert the other alternative. A great writer has said, and truly said, "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones." But there are lives to which death places no period, which continue on forever in the influences of their good deeds and words. The poet Browning sings:

"All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance but itself; no beauty nor good nor power,
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard;
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard,
Enough that He heard it once: we shall hear it by and by.

To-night, nearly sixteen years from the day when McGee's inspired voice last charmed the admiring crowds who waited on his graceful periods, it is meet that we should ask ourselves if we have accomplished all his hopes and put into practice all the lessons which he taught.

And I believe that I cannot do better than conclude by conjuring you, the Irishmen of Sherbrooke, and not alone the Irishmen, but the Frenchmen, and the Englishmen, and the Scotchmen, to remember and take to heart the words he spoke and the example he showed forth. And following him, let us lay aside all of our own past that conflicts and grates with aught of the past of our fellow-man. If, in the national edifice which we are all anxious to construct, we are to expect the lofty pinnacles and imposing turrets of true national greatness and success, we must see to it that the foundations are the broad and firm ones of respect and honesty and common purpose; that the walls are constructed with prudence and tolerance, and the whole cemented by good-will, benevolence, and a truly national spirit. I counsel no sacrifice of principle, no foregoing of conviction or faith, for I believe that we can, without any such act, unite in a common effort for the good of our common country—a country whose future grows every day more bright as her marvellous resources are unfolded—a future which cannot fail to be attained if each man will only work to the end with the same humane consideration, the same lofty inspiration, the same unrelenting zeal and patriotic devotion which distinguished your great fellow-countryman and my great fellow-countryman, the late Thomas D'Arcy McGee.







